

MONGOLIA AND THE UNITED STATES CELEBRATE 25 YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC TIES

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January 2012 marks the 25th anniversary of a landmark event – the establishment of diplomatic ties between the United States and Mongolia.

Of course, relations between the two countries are rooted in a much older history. The Mongolian National Archives contains a number of “travel passes” provided to early Western travelers who traversed “Outer Mongolia” en route from Peking to St. Petersburg. One of those passes, dated October 1862, was issued to a “Mr. Polosi” from the United States. Mr. Polosi may have been the first American citizen to ever set foot in Mongolia.

During subsequent years, other Americans followed the same route, some in search of adventure and others in a quest for scientific knowledge or business prospects. One early American traveler was Thomas H. Knox, a former Civil War correspondent from New Hampshire. He later wrote about his trip in the August 1868 issue of *Galaxy* magazine, where he noted that Mongolians were “proud of tracing their ancestry to the soldiers that marched with Genghis Khan and carried his victorious banners into Central Europe.”

Three decades later, a young American engineer named Herbert Hoover crossed the Gobi Desert from China and visited “Urga,” as Ulaanbaatar was then known. During his short stay, he toured Gandaan Monastery and met the Bogd Khan. Later in life, Herbert Hoover became the thirty-first President of the United States.

During the early years of the twentieth century, more and more Americans began making their way to Mongolia. In fact, the area around the Kempinski Hotel in Ulaanbaatar is to this day known as “American Dunj,” reflecting its early emergence as a place where American merchants and traders first set up shop.

Other pioneering American visitors to Mongolia included former U.S. Ambassador to China William Woodville Rockhill, who passed through Mongolia in 1913; Swedish-born missionary and businessman Frans August Larson, who later became an American citizen and spoke excellent Mongolian; and American adventurer and explorer Roy Chapman Andrews, who mounted several successful expeditions to the Gobi Desert during the early 1920s in search of dinosaur bones.

Developing these early encounters between the United States and Mongolia into a diplomatic relationship took much longer. In 1918, a young American diplomat based in Beijing named A.W. Ferrin urged his superiors to open an office in Mongolia, suggesting that it would prove to be “a most helpful factor in the development of a wonderful country.” In 1944, U.S. Vice President Henry Wallace visited Ulaanbaatar at the end of a long journey that also included China, Siberia, and Soviet Central Asia. He was met on arrival by Marshal Choibalsan as well as by many thousands of ordinary and no doubt curious Mongolians who had probably never seen an American before.



Former President N. Enkhbayar with former US President George W. Bush, Ulaanbaatar, 2005

Mongolia's accession to the United Nations in 1961 brought further opportunities for Americans and Mongolians to meet. It also resulted in the establishment of a Mongolian presence in New York in the form of a permanent diplomatic mission to the United Nations.

In later years, Mongolian diplomats based in New York facilitated additional contacts with the United States. These growing ties culminated in official recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Mongolia on January 27, 1987. The brief signing ceremony took place in the Treaty Room at the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C., with then-U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz participating.

Over the last quarter century, diplomatic ties between the United States and Mongolia have grown significantly, and they are now both wide and deep. While reflecting many facets of engagement, bilateral relations largely focus on five main areas:

DEVELOPMENT: Since 1991, USAID has provided more than \$220 million in grant support for Mongolia. In the early years, this assistance focused on emergency relief; in later years, the emphasis turned more toward good governance and small business development as well as financial sector support, including a significant engagement with both Khan Bank and Xac Bank. More recently, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

is providing \$285 million in grant assistance to support development in Mongolia.

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COMMERCIAL: Mongolia is quickly transitioning beyond donor relationships to commercial ones. As recently as 2009, annual U.S. exports to Mongolia were estimated at only \$40 million. In 2011, they were on track to exceed \$250 million. Major U.S. companies such as Boeing, Caterpillar, and General Electric are actively involved in Mongolia, and there is every indication that major American mining companies such as Peabody will significantly strengthen their engagement as well.

SECURITY: Along with many other countries, the United States supports Mongolia in its emergence as a contributor to UN peacekeeping ►►

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS



US Vice President Joe Biden pays official visit to Mongolia, 2011

and other international security efforts around the world. Already, the Mongolian military has served with distinction under the UN flag in Sierra Leone, Chad, Kosovo, Sudan, and elsewhere. It has also deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS: Perhaps the most enduring ties are those that develop between individual Americans and Mongolians in any number of areas, including culture and education. Under the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, the United States is providing \$672,000 to help preserve and protect the Amarbayasgalant Monastery, a cultural treasure located in a remote but beautiful valley five hours north of Ulaanbaatar. As many as 2,500 Mongolian students are now studying in the United States. In the past two years, the number of Fulbright Scholarships has increased from three to 16, including nine funded by the Government of Mongolia. And, this year, more than 130 Peace Corps volunteers are working in education, health, business development, and other areas across the length and breadth of Mongolia.

POLITICAL TIES: For the last two decades, the United States has strongly supported Mongolia's "decision for democracy," and the United States welcomes Mongolia's current chairmanship of the Community of Democracies. Support for Mongolia's democracy has been reflected in a succession of high-profile visitors. These visitors have included then-First Lady Hillary Clinton, who arrived in Ulaanbaatar in September 1995 and met with senior Mongolian leaders while also experiencing something of the Mongolian countryside. Later, she wrote in her memoir *Living History* that she was "mesmerized" by her encounter with a herder family living on

the Mongolian steppe, which she found "stunning in its vastness, serenity and natural beauty."

Over the years, several U.S. Secretaries of State have also visited Mongolia, including James Baker (1990 and again in 1991), Madeleine Albright (1998) and Condoleezza Rice, who accompanied then-President George W. Bush on his historic visit to Ulaanbaatar on November 21, 2005. Echoing the sentiments of many other Americans who have visited Mongolia, George Bush especially praised the country as a "beautiful land, with huge skies and vast horizons."

Vice President Joe Biden's more recent visit to Mongolia on August 22, 2011, further strengthened relations between the two countries. In addition to meeting with both President Elbegdorj and Prime Minister Batbold, he attended a "mini-Nadaam" organized near Genghis Khan Airport, experiencing Mongolian culture first hand. During his meetings at Government House, the Vice President praised Mongolia as a "close friend and partner" of the United States, adding that "we look forward to even closer ties in the years to come."

Anniversary celebrations typically provide a useful and appropriate opportunity to look back and reflect. Relations between the United States and Mongolia have grown tremendously in the last 25 years, and there is much to be proud of. Anniversaries also serve to light a path forward and underscore future possibilities. And, looking toward the next quarter century, there is little doubt that ties between the United States and Mongolia will strengthen further in the years ahead. ■